

children who call are assured to receive shelters and services that meet their needs.

While there are many worthwhile issues that must be addressed by this Congress in the next few weeks, I can think of no better accomplishment for Congress than to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act and pass my National Domestic Violence Hotline Enhancement Act. Simply put, these laws will help keep wives, daughters, sisters, and friends from becoming victims of domestic violence.

RURAL LOAN GUARANTEE PROGRAM

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, as a conferee last year on the satellite television bill, I worked hard to include, along with several of my colleagues, a provision that would have ensured that the benefits of that bill would also be shared by rural Americans through a loan guarantee program.

Those benefits include providing local-into-local television over satellite—which simply means that rural Americans would be able to receive their local network stations over satellite if they owned a satellite dish, along with the full range of weather, movie, superstation, sports and a host of other channels.

We wanted to ensure that rural Americans would get the same level of television service over satellite as urban Americans would enjoy.

As it turns out, urban Americans can now receive the full array of local network channels over satellite—but the great majority of rural Americans can not.

Unfortunately, the Chairman of the Banking Committee objected to the provision—at the end of last year—that would have helped finance such service to rural areas and we have been unable to resolve this matter.

At the time I was very worried this would happen which is why I discussed it at some length on the floor.

I want to stress, once again, to all of my colleagues that this is very important to our constituents. We need to work together so that we can resolve this problem and make sure that rural America is not left in the dark.

I am here today, to again stand with rural Americans. I have already mentioned on the floor several times that if we tried to hold a Conference on this issue that we would be unable to pass the bill this year.

I said few weeks ago that we simply do not have time to go through the formal Conference process. The e-signature Conference, for example, took many months. As I have warned everyone before—we do not have time for a Conference.

However, if we work together we can easily finish a bill that will actually work and get local television stations carried over satellite.

With a few improvements to the House-passed or to the Senate-passed bills we can get this job done for rural America.

We need to make sure that the federal guarantee can cover providing high-speed Internet access to rural Americans. As long as we are going to help finance a satellite we should get the biggest benefit out of it by having it also help break down the digital divide.

Also, some of the bill provisions consist of such atypical, and onerous, credit requirement that I do not think that any lenders will want to participate.

I have two basic concerns with the proposed language, and have serious concerns about the extraneous House provisions on cell telephones and the like.

I also understand through lobbyists that efforts are being made to include language that would take away FCC authority to approve the new “Northpoint” technology that could provide local-into-local television in many areas of the country. My understanding is that some of the satellite providers are concerned that Northpoint could compete with them.

In terms of the credit provisions of the bill, I am worried that potential borrowers may have long-term existing contractual obligations or security agreements whose contract terms would be abrogated by this law if they were to participate in this loan guarantee program.

If they received a guaranteed loan under the bill, their lenders could pull back existing credit lines for violating their contracts by complying with the new law.

With respect to the default language, even a minor default could lead to liquidation which would reduce the ability of the United States to protect its own interests and, in addition, could trigger unnecessary defaults on loans or projects which the borrower may have with the United States, or other lenders.

The additional problem with the superpriority bankruptcy language is that it is a backdoor “taking” of property because it would take the property rights of creditors that have other prior perfected security interests in the borrower’s property.

These contract property rights—which would be destroyed after the fact—could be very valuable and the bill could take them away.

Mr. President, I have provided language to most interested offices some months ago to resolve these points which may appear at first blush to be technical but, in fact, could make it impossible for this program to work.

I have also proposed language to ensure that rural Americans are able to receive high-speed Internet access under this bill. The section on prerequisites for the loan does not list

high-speed Internet access as a purpose for the guarantee.

I recommend adding “high-speed Internet access” to that section so that the Board could approve a guarantee which would include that purpose, as a secondary consideration.

I have pointed out before on the Senate floor that, “computers are on a development path that improves performance by a factor of 10 every five years,” according to Scientific American.

However, without high-speed linkage of these constantly improving computers rural America will be left behind.

In America, there is a growing disparity between the digital “haves” and “have-nots” as portions of our society get left behind at the same lightning pace at which the Internet develops.

I would like the bill changed so that we can close the “digital divide” that keeps rural America from fully participating in America’s economic boom under President Clinton.

I know that some are fighting to keep this disparity—but this disparity between rural and urban America is self-defeating as the Internet becomes an increasingly important thread of our business and social fabric.

So I hope all my colleagues will join with me in working together to get this program in operation before Congress goes out of session.

APPROPRIATIONS—INTERIOR AND RELATED AGENCIES

Mrs. LINCOLN. Mr. President, I rise today to talk about the Interior Appropriations Bill for fiscal 2001 and our efforts here in the Senate to enact the Conservation and Reinvestment Act to provide permanent funding for land, water, and wildlife conservation programs in this nation.

With the passage of the Interior Appropriations Bill for fiscal year 2001, we have taken a step in the right direction toward providing a permanent conservation fund for this nation—but it is only a step.

The Interior Appropriations bill funds many important programs and projects in Arkansas including refurbishing the historic Hot Springs National Park Bathhouses, constructing a visitors center at the White River National Wildlife Refuge, and funding needed construction and maintenance at recreation areas in the Ouachita National Forest.

The bill also increases the funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund, Payments in Lieu of Taxes, Urban and Historic Preservation programs, State Conservation grants. And needed funding for tackling the maintenance backlog in our nation’s park system. But it leaves many of the programs that we have pushed for in the Conservation and Reinvestment Act out completely. Specifically, it leaves